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IAC-D-57/69

26 July 1957

Post-Mortem on NIE 11-3-57:

Probable Intelligence Warning of Soviet Attack

on the US Through Mid-1960,

dated 18 June 1957

I. Findings

1. In preparing NIE 11-3-57 a somewhat different approach was undertaken from that which had been used for the predecessor estimate, NIE 11-6-55 of 1 July 1955.* Instead of relating the warning problem largely to various forms and scales of initial attack open to the USSR, the new NIE sought to explore much more fully certain variable and imponderable factors which might be present in any future warning situation.

2. Pursuant to IAC-D-57/14, the National Indications Center and the National Security Agency participated in the production of NIE 11-3-57, the former also having prepared an extensive written contribution. These agencies should again participate formally in future warning estimates.

3. The accumulated experience with papers on warning has served to underline certain inherent difficulties in estimating on this subject:

a. Warning would always be the product of an extremely complex situation involving factors which cannot be anticipated in advance. While intelligence can gear itself to obtain many kinds of indications, and to evaluate their relative significance if and when they appeared, it cannot be certain in advance of the precise weight which would be attached to them in reaching a warning judgment in any real situation.

*In view of the hypothetical character of the problem examined in NIE 11-6-55, a validity study in the ordinary sense is not appropriate.

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b. Inasmuch as many of our estimates of Soviet capabilities and current levels of military readiness have a tentative and imprecise character, an essential element is lacking for making precise estimates of the warning intelligence may be able to give.

c. An estimate of the warning that intelligence could provide is in the nature of the case a net estimate, and therefore requires a more complete picture of present and future US intelligence capabilities for obtaining warning indications than has been available.

4. The problems referred to in 3 a cannot be overcome and would always be inherent in any estimate of probable warning. With respect to 3 b, we believe that the next warning estimate should be based on assumptions concerning Soviet alternative courses of action based on estimated Soviet capabilities. At the same time it will doubtless be useful from time to time to reexamine the more general and theoretical aspects of warning such as are discussed in Sections I and II of NIE 11-3-57.

5. The problem referred to in 3 c is already being given attention. IAC-M-289, item 3, set up the Warning Systems Survey Committee, which is designed to provide a current appraisal of present and prospective capabilities of intelligence in the warning field.

II. Action

The Board of National Estimates and the IAC representatives are requested to take account of the above considerations when next the IAC schedules an estimate on warning of attack.

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